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THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW.

By the REVEREND THOMAS J. RAMSDELL,
South Paris, Me.

The central theme of Matthew's gospel is the kingdom of heaven, which expression is used as a synonym of the phrase kingdom of God. It is well known that the spirit of reverence among the Jews was so great that they systematically avoided the pronounciation of the divine name. Hence, Matthew, writing principally for Jews, respects this feeling, and speaks of the kingdom of heaven instead of the kingdom of God.

To refer to the source of this idea of the kingdom of God, as found in the Old Testament Scriptures, perhaps the most striking expressions are found in the writings of Daniel. Some of them are as follows: "I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all people, nation, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." "The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." Other prophets in earlier times had written in the same strain. We read in Micah, "I will make the halting a remnant and the far-scattered a strong nation. And Jehovah shall reign over them in Mount Zion henceforth and forever." And Jeremiah prophesies, "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice upon the earth." There are many more passages of the

same import in the prophetic books. We have also, in what are known as the Messianic passages in the historical books of the Old Testament and in the Psalms, frequent references to a future kingdom.

When Christ came, the idea of the kingdom of heaven had been cherished among the Jews for centuries. But the views which largely prevailed among them as to the nature of that kingdom were in many respects false and misleading. The teachings of Christ concerning the kingdom of heaven were often in direct opposition to Jewish belief. Nowhere in the New Testament is this contrast more strikingly displayed than in the gospel of Matthew. In considering the teachings of this gospel on the kingdom of heaven it will be convenient to class them under four heads. First, The Ruler of the Kingdom. Second, The Subjects of the Kingdom. Third, The Legislation of the Kingdom. Fourth, The Consummation of the Kingdom.

I. THE RULER OF THE KINGDOM.

The Old Testament taught that the coming king would be a descendant of David. Matthew opens his gospel with a genealogical table showing that Jesus Christ was descended from that royal line so dear to the heart of every son of Israel. A little further on the evangelist records the visit of the wise men to the cradle of the infant Christ with their significant question, "Where is he that was born king of the Jews?" He also tells of the demand of Herod as to where Christ should be born. In reply there is quoted the prophecy concerning Bethlehem, "Out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel." Thus we see the prominence given to the kingly idea at the very outset. When we turn to Christ himself as portrayed in this gospel we find him assuming the authority of a king. With an oft repeated, "I say unto you," he lays down laws for the government of his subjects. He shows by his miracles that he has power over the forces of nature, and also over disease and death. He assumes the divine prerogative of the forgiveness of sins. Nor is this all. He gives a vivid description of the last judgment, and represents himself as fixing forever the eternal destiny

of men. In keeping with this is his confession before the high priest that he is the Christ, the Son of God, and that hereafter he will return in the clouds of heaven. Yet notwithstanding his assumption of authority, and the fact that he speaks of the kingdom of heaven as *my* kingdom he teaches his disciples to pray to the Father, "*thy* kingdom come." When asked to bestow places of honor in his kingdom he promptly replies that such rewards are not his to give, but that they shall be given to those for whom they have been prepared by his Father. While asserting his claim to be the ruler of the kingdom, Christ also makes it clear that it is a delegated authority which he exercises. On one occasion he says, explicitly, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father." After his resurrection he says, "All power is *given* unto me in heaven and in earth." Primarily, then, the authority over the kingdom resides in God, but he has delegated it to his Son, to be exercised by him till the final consummation of the kingdom.

II. THE SUBJECTS OF THE KINGDOM.

The Jews believed that every one of their nation who had not forfeited his rights by outbreking wickedness, was, by birth, a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. Christ recognized no such claims as these. On one occasion, after commending the faith of a gentile, he declared that many should come from the east and the west, and should sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but that the children of the kingdom (using the phrase, of course, in the popular acceptation) should be cast into outer darkness. Thus it appears that something more than descent from Abraham is needed to constitute one a subject of the kingdom. There is, however, a wider sense, in which all men, both good and bad, are regarded as subjects of the kingdom. This is brought prominently to notice in those parables which speak of a final separation of the good and bad. Wheat and tares grow together till the harvest. The dragnet gathers fish of every kind. The king is in reality the lawful ruler over wicked and rebellious subjects no less than over the loyal and loving. But we are chiefly concerned with the more limited sense of the word

subjects, which confines itself to those who acknowledge the authority of the King and who enjoy the privileges of the kingdom. One condition, without fulfilling which men cannot become subjects, is made prominent at the outset. John the Baptist, the herald of the King, began his ministry by calling on men to repent because the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Of course the implication was that without repentance men could not become subjects of that kingdom. Christ himself began his ministry with the same proclamation. Later on he pronounced a fearful doom upon some of the towns in which he had wrought miracles, because they did not repent. Without this repentance Jewish descent was of no avail so far as membership in the kingdom was concerned, but with repentance, even the criminal and the outcast might become members of the kingdom.

In addition to repentance, true subjects of the kingdom must have faith in Christ. The word faith, in Matthew's gospel, usually conveys the idea of trust or confidence. It is an affair of the heart rather than of the head. For example, the woman who was healed of the issue of blood evidently did not have a clear apprehension of the person and nature of Christ, but she had unlimited confidence in him, and hence he says to her, "Thy faith hath made thee whole." We do not find the word "faith" or the kindred verb "believe" occurring so often in Matthew as in the other evangelists. Nevertheless the general tenor of his gospel proceeds on the assumption that those who have become subjects of the kingdom have full confidence in Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

Those who would be loyal to Christ must acknowledge him before the world. So essential is this that it is explicitly declared that any man who shall deny Christ shall be denied by him in the presence of the Father. In this connection Christ also insists that a man must set loyalty to him above everything else in the world, and must be ready to sacrifice promptly everything that stands in the way of such loyalty. The strongest earthly ties must be severed at once if they hold one back from entering upon the Lord's service. The King claims the first place in the hearts of his subjects, and no man who is unwilling to accord him that place can become a subject of his kingdom.

Many will make professions of loyalty who at heart will not be loyal, and to these the King will say at last, "I never knew you." But genuine disciples will bring forth the fruits of the kingdom. Accordingly there are certain characteristic marks by which true disciples may be known. Several of these distinguishing traits of character are mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount. True subjects of the kingdom will recognize their own spiritual destitution, and hence will be ready to magnify the free grace of the King in bestowing his favors upon them. They will not cherish a spirit of resentment, even toward those who wrong them, but will love their enemies, and do good to them. They will try earnestly to promote peace instead of strife. They will also seek earnestly after purity of heart. The religion of that time was greatly concerned about external and bodily purifications, but Christ shows that it is something far deeper than this which his kingdom demands. The heart, the fountain of life, must be pure, and then the life will be right. Again, the loyal subject of the King will reverence and obey the Scriptures and he will strive to bring others to the same reverence and obedience which he himself manifests. He will also possess a trusting and childlike spirit. He will not strive after the highest places, but will be content to serve the King in whatever sphere shall be assigned him. Such are some of the principal traits of character that distinguish those who are true subjects of the kingdom.

Matthew makes it very plain that the kingdom of heaven, though it has been established among the Jewish people, is by no means to be confined to them. In this connection it is worth while to notice one very important saying of our Lord which Matthew alone records. After uttering the parable of the Vineyard, that scorching rebuke to Israel after the flesh, he says plainly to the rulers of the people, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Matthew must have known well how offensive this record of the Lord's words would be to those of his Jewish readers who did not acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, but he knew also their importance in throwing light upon the question

as to who should become subjects of the kingdom. In the closing words of the gospel the fact is brought out in clearest light that those subjects are not to come from one favored nation but from all nations. It is true that our evangelist has recorded that when Jesus sent forth the twelve he commanded them not to go "into any way of the gentiles," but that was only a temporary and preparatory mission. Before ascending to heaven he plans another and greater mission for his disciples. He commands them to go and make disciples of *all* nations. These disciples are to be baptized and taught all the things which Christ commanded his immediate followers, or, in other words, in order that they may become faithful and obedient subjects they are to be taught the laws of the kingdom. The gospel of Matthew sets forth these laws with such distinctness and emphasis that there is no need that they should be misunderstood.

III. THE LEGISLATION OF THE KINGDOM.

Christ paid no attention to many of the curious and subtle distinctions made by the Pharisees between what was lawful and what was not. Indeed, he even denounced them for burdening tender consciences with such needless questions of casuistry. But it must be remembered that he insisted rigidly upon obedience to the law of God as revealed in the Old Testament. He warned men especially against the mistake of supposing that he had come to destroy that law or to set it aside. On the contrary, he would have his followers manifest the utmost reverence for it. In order that the way of obedience may be made plain the Lord takes a number of the commandments and shows the superficial and unspiritual interpretation put upon them by the religious leaders of the time, and then he shows their true spiritual application. He does not set aside the Old Testament precepts. He only amplifies and unfolds them. He takes the familiar command, "Thou shalt not kill," and shows that the spirit of the prohibition applies also to angry and bitter feelings against another. In like manner he takes the command, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," and shows that it forbids even the unchaste look. The most rigid Pharisee in his expositions of

the law never went so far as this. He and his class confined themselves to outward and ceremonial refinements, but Christ strikes at the root of the matter and shows that obedience to the laws of his kingdom, to be genuine, must spring from the heart.

Greed for gain is especially reprehended by Christ. Not only is this the case in the sermon on the mount, but Matthew also records that later in Christ's ministry a young man came to him desiring to become one of his subjects, or in other words to inherit eternal life. The sincerity of his wish is tested by commanding him to sell his possessions and distribute the proceeds to the poor. The young man fails to meet the test, and Christ improves the opportunity by pointing out to the disciples how hard it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The prominence which Christ gives to the law of marriage and divorce is very noticeable. He expressly and positively lays it down as the law of his kingdom that there shall be no such thing as divorce with the right of remarriage except for the single cause of adultery. When his attention is called to the difference between his teaching and that of Moses on this point, he quotes the divine law of marriage laid down at the creation, as found in the second chapter of Genesis. He shows his critics that though he sets aside a law of Moses intended to serve a temporary purpose, he substitutes for it the original law of God which had been temporarily superseded. Here again is another illustration of Christ's saying that he came not to destroy but to fulfill. Profanity in every form is strictly prohibited. Revenge is also forbidden. In order that the feeling which prompts to revengeful deeds may have no place in the heart, men are commanded to love their enemies. He teaches that in case of injuries it is better to go to the extreme of absolute non-resistance in all cases than to indulge a revengeful spirit which ought to be absolutely foreign to the heart of every subject of the Messiah's reign.

There is another law of the kingdom which has often been strangely overlooked. It is the law of the extension of the kingdom—the command to carry the offer of citizenship to all nations. Just as the citizen of an earthly government is liable to military duty for the defense and preservation of that govern-

ment, so the subject of the heavenly kingdom is responsible for service in the war of conquest which the King is carrying on. It is very evident that this law continues binding till the work of making disciples of the nations shall be completed.

There is one great principle underlying the entire legislation of the kingdom. That principle is the fundamental law of love. On one occasion a critic of Christ put to him the question, "Which is the great commandment in the law?" The reply was, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment and the second is like to it. 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.'" It is very plain from this teaching that instead of perplexing himself about petty forms and ceremonies as the scribes and Pharisees were accustomed to do, a man's great concern should be to know first of all that his heart is filled with love to God and love to his fellowman. He alone is an ideal subject of the kingdom whose heart is thus filled, and he alone will be right in his conduct toward both God and men.

IV. THE CONSUMMATION OF THE KINGDOM.

According to Matthew the kingdom of heaven or the Messianic reign established on earth by Christ is to grow and extend itself till it reaches a consummation. No hint is given as to the actual length of time that must elapse before that event is reached, yet the import of Christ's teaching is that the progress of the kingdom is to be comparatively slow. The Jews looked for a Messianic reign that should begin with a display of great power and splendor. Christ teaches that such a display will be made, but it is to come not at the inauguration but at the consummation of the kingdom. Not all at once is the king's authority to be acknowledged and his reign to become supreme. Rather is there to be a gradual extension of the kingdom. The popular idea among the Jews was that the coming of the Messiah would mark a change so radical in the state of society and in the condition of their own nation that they habitually spoke of the time preceding the advent of the Messiah as the present age and the time succeeding his advent as the coming age. Christ accepted

this popular phraseology, but used it in a slightly different meaning. He makes the *second* advent the boundary line between this age and the coming one. He has come and planted his kingdom in this present age. That kingdom is to go on developing in spite of all opposition, and its final completion is to mark the ending of the age that now is, and the ushering in of the age that is to come.

This paper has no new light to shed on those vexed questions of eschatology which have been in dispute among biblical scholars for centuries. In all probability there will not be a general agreement of opinion among Christians on those subjects till the second advent occurs. Nevertheless, Matthew has recorded certain plain and unmistakable teachings of Christ concerning some incidents of the final and permanent triumph of the kingdom of heaven.

One matter upon which especial stress is laid is the separation between the good and bad. In the present stage of the kingdom's development no such separation is attempted. Christ taught those who were surprised at this that the wheat and tares must grow together till the harvest. In the wider sense, all men are subjects of the kingdom; but many are disobedient and rebellious subjects. They interfere to hinder the growth of the kingdom. They persecute and even kill loyal subjects because of their loyalty. But let no one suppose that this state of affairs is to continue forever. It is only temporary. The tares are mingled with the wheat, but only till the time of harvest. The net gathers fish of every kind, but no sooner is it drawn to land than the work of separating the good from the worthless is begun. Over and over again Christ emphasizes the truth that the wicked and the righteous are to dwell together only during this present age. Then the great separation comes. And this process of separation is to be carried on not only among those who shall be living on the earth at the time of the Lord's return but it will take place among all who have ever lived, for the resurrection is to precede this separation. The writer of this paper is, of course, aware that there are some who hold to the belief that the judgment scene described in the twenty-fifth chapter of this gospel

applies only to those who shall be living on earth at the time of the Lord's return, but even those who hold such an opinion must admit that the final consummation of the kingdom will not take place till after the final judgment. In this gospel Christ nowhere gives any extended teaching in regard to the resurrection, but he assumes that it will take place. When the Sadducees cavil at the doctrine he silences them at once by showing that their unbelief of the resurrection is due to ignorance of the Scriptures. Marked prominence is given to the fact that final rewards and punishments are not to come till the consummation of the kingdom. When one of the disciples asked Christ what reward they should have who had left all to follow him, he does, it is true, make mention in his reply of some benefits to be received in this present age, but principally he directs their attention to the time when "the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory," and makes them a promise clothed in figurative language of a great reward at that time. Christ also represents himself as saying to those on his right hand in the great day of separation, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." This certainly cannot mean that they had not been members of his kingdom before, but it does mean that then for the first time they were to enter upon the enjoyment of that kingdom in its final and perfect state. Then, and then only, will the reward of the loyal subject be complete.

So then, at the consummation of the kingdom the righteous dead are to be raised that they may share in its blessings and its triumphs, and the wicked dead will be raised and receive the due reward of their deeds. Angels under the direction of the king are to go forth and sever the wicked from among the just. The long conflict between good and evil will end. All things that offend and that do iniquity will at last be gathered out of the kingdom. Henceforth that kingdom will embrace only loyal subjects, for its enemies will have been banished forever.